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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM ECON SY IZ TU

SUBJECT: GOOD NEWS AND BAD: DIYARBAKIR'S PROTESTANTS AND ADANA'S CATHOLICS

REF: A) ADANA 167 B) ADANA 162

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Diyarbakir's Protestant Church has been issued a license by local government offices designating its building as a "religious site facility," and expects to receive "settlement permission" soon, allowing their building to legally function as a church. At the same time, in the aftermath of Adana's recently closed Catholic church, the small Catholic and Greek Orthodox community continues to feel isolated and pressured by official neglect and societal prejudice, while still hoping that officials in Ankara and the European Parliament can bring about a more positive outcome for their dilemma (reftel A). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a recent telephone conversation with the Consulate, Diyarbakir Protestant Church Pastor Ahmet Guvener expressed gratitude for the Consulate's support during the church's court hearings regarding the church's zoning problems (reftel B). Guvener said the problems had been resolved and a license had been issued to the church that designated the building as "a religious site facility." The license was signed by the Diyarbakir Municipality, the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Committee and the Sur Municipality. Guvener said that he was confident that Sur Municipality will grant the church "settlement permission" some time during the week of October 17, allowing the Protestant group's building to legally function as a church. He added that, modeled on the experience of the Kurtulus Church in Ankara, his congregation was working on founding an association dedicated to continuing the struggle for the church's right to carry on religious activities without facing any legal hindrance.

¶3. (SBU) AMCON Adana spoke with staff of the Catholic Church's Bishopric for the Anatolian region October 11 to determine the Bishop's current intentions for the Adana Church now that he has stopped its operations. His staff reported that the Bishop was in Rome at a Synod, but that they thought his decision to close the church "would get the Turks attention." They said that they were frustrated by over 10 years of unsuccessfully raising zoning and encroachment issues with various local Turkish officials in Adana "and now the dialogue is with the Ambassadors and Turks in Ankara." "It is also now a matter for the European Parliament," according to the Bishop's staff. They said that the small Catholic and Greek Orthodox community, which the Church also serves, felt isolated and pressured by official neglect and societal prejudice and hoped that the officials would respond to their requests for closing the neighboring noisy wedding hall and creating the open space around a place of worship called for in Turkish law. If so, they would re-open, said the staff.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The Diyarbakir Protestant Church case is good news and represents progress on the religious freedom front, but we must also bear in mind the recent Adana Catholic Church closing. End Comment.

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